(b) whether the opinion in the official circle is also in India's favour; and

(c) if so, what steps Government have taken to secure lifting of these sanctions as early as possible?

THE MINISTER OF STATE* IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) The United States has lifted a number of unilateral restrictions imposed on India after the nuclear tests in May 1998. Several members of the United States Congress and foreign policy experts have expressed the opinion that the United States should lift the remaining restrictions on India.

(b) Yes, Sir. Since entering office in January 2001, the new U.S. Administration has conveyed on a number of occasipns, both in bilateral meetings and publicly, that it has initiated the review process for lifting the remaining sanctions against India, including through consultations with the United States Congress.

(c) Government has consistently maintained that all unilateral U.S. restrictions against India are unjustified and counter-productive and should be completely removed in order to create a more broad-based, forward looking and mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries.

Bush Administration's Plan for Missile Defence System

1277. DR. BIPLAB DASGUPTA:

SHRI CO. POULOSE:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have since supported the Bush administration's plan for a Missile Defence System;

(b) if so, what are the reasons therefor;

(c) whether it is a fact that he himself was against such support earlier; and

(d) if so, the reasons for change?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) and (b) Official communications received so far from the US have not elaborated on a plan for a Missile Defence System. India's reaction related to President Bush's Statement of 1st May 2001, where he has outlined a new strategic framework comprising four elements, i.e., non-proliferation, counter proliferation, missile defence, and a reduction in US strategic nuclear forces. In Government's official statement of 2nd May 2001, it was stated, *inter alia,* that "India, particularly, welcomes the announcement of unilateral reductions by the US of nuclear forces, as an example. We also welcome moving away from the hair-trigger alerts associated with prevailing nuclear orthodoxies. India believes that there is a strategic and technological inevitability in stepping away from a world that is held hostage by the doctrine of MAD to a cooperative, defensive transition that is underpinned by further cuts and a de-alert of nuclear forces. We note with appreciation the US resolve to seek dialogue, consultation and cooperation with the countries concerned towards a fulfillment of this vision. India has always stood for a multilateral compact that results in an elimination of all nuclear weapons globally."

(c) and (d) Does not arise.

Police Verification for Issuing Passports

1278. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what steps Government are taking or proposed to take with the help of the State Governments to speed up the Police verification for issuing passports to the people;

(b) what steps Government have taken to simplify the process of issuing passports;

(c) whether there is any proposal before Government to reduce the number of days for issuing passports; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?